

U.S. Representative Sanford Bishop Tuesday (6/17) sharply criticized a majority on the House Appropriations Committee for rejecting a proposal to address critical needs in military service and homeland defense with funds provided by a temporary delay in a portion of the tax cuts approved this year for America's wealthiest citizens.

"It's unjust and unconscionable that, on the one hand, we praise our soldiers, sailors and airmen as heroes, which they are, and on the other hand, we turn our backs on the housing and other needs of their wives and children even while they are away fighting overseas," he said.

"It's just wrong," he added, "to put a higher priority on bigger tax cuts for the wealthy than on the security and well being of our military personnel and our citizens at home."

The House Appropriations Committee reported out a \$9.2 billion Military Construction Appropriations Bill and a \$30.43 billion Homeland Security Appropriations Bill for consideration on the full House floor. Representative Bishop is a member of the panel.

The Second District Congressman-citing testimony of widespread deficiencies in military working and training conditions, in housing, and in other quality-of-life needs of military personnel, as well as shortcomings in homeland security-supported an amendment that would have added \$1 billion to each of the appropriations bills from revenue provided by reducing the average tax cut for Americans making more than \$1 million a year from \$88,326 to \$83,546. The temporary tax cut for the wealthy, which was provided as part of the \$350 billion tax cut package enacted by Congress earlier in the year, would have been fully restored the following year.

But a majority of the committee's members voted down the amendment, introduced by Representative David Obey of Wisconsin, on both bills.

At the same time, however, he commended the committee for including language he requested in the Homeland Security Appropriations Bill calling on the Homeland Security Department to consider a demonstration project to strengthen firefighting capabilities in rural areas, and to direct the agency to move forward in implementing a program he sponsored, and was enacted by Congress this past year, to meet the special needs of many minority populations in preparing for emergencies.

The Georgia Congressman said many of the military quality-of-life needs not addressed in the Military Construction Appropriations Bill are critical to service men and women and their families. In housing alone, he said, barracks for 83,000 personnel and units for 128,860 families are rated as substandard. He said extra funding is also needed for military families in other areas, including education and health care.

He said the Homeland Security Appropriations Bill does not provide sufficient funding to meet some of the identifiable shortcomings in protecting the country's people and infrastructure against acts of terrorism, including meeting all of the security needs at the nation's ports and borders.

The two appropriations bills now go to the House Rules Committee to be scheduled for full consideration in the House of Representatives. This panel could adopt rules for debating the measures that would allow an amendment rejected at the committee level to be considered on the House floor.